

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY  
**CHARLES DICKENS**

No. 685. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 1882.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

## JACK DOYLE'S DAUGHTER.

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PART III. MISS DOYLE.

### CHAPTER XIV. BEHIND THE SCENES.

It is not the easiest thing in the world, even in Liberty Hall itself, for a young lady guest and the son and heir's man-of-all-work to obtain confidential speech together. But a trained conspirator like Count Stanislas Adrianski is, or ought to be, equal to any occasion. It moreover belongs to his craft and calling—so, at least, we are told by people who say they know—to be profoundly versed in all the ins and outs of human nature, and to be able to tell by a straw which way the wind blows. So he could not fail to think that Phoebe would think it odd that a patriot hero, whose head, heart, hand, and sword were due in Poland, should all of a sudden turn up at a country house in the capacity of a young gentleman's valet. There are lands, it is true, where long-descended nobles—so long-descended as to have reached the very bottom—are to be found in such bewildering profusion as to make it even betting that it is a count who blacks one's boots or cuts one's hair; and there are lands, too, where titled coal-merchants, stock-brokers, grocers, poulterers, and publicans are less uncommon than they were in the dark ages. But an Adrianski could not forsake the romantic fiddle for the servile clothes-brush without some better reason than need of monthly wages; an Adrianski could not desert his country at her need in order that Ralph Bassett should be properly groomed. Honour, and a hundred other things, forbade that Mademoiselle Doyle should be left, for one

needless moment, to run to such base conclusions as these would be. Of course no conspirator who is worth his salt thinks of betraying to a woman the true mainsprings of his actions—the secret history of the mysteries in which he is involved. The cause might doubtless require, for the present, to be served in a menial capacity. Causes are very often served in yet more illogical ways. The whole how and why were not for a woman's tell-tale ears; but—yes; in a general way she had a right to know that even this apparent degradation was ennobled by being all for the cause.

So Phoebe had not been five minutes at Cautleigh Hall before she found, upon her toilette-table, an envelope addressed to her in the now too familiar flourishes of a certain style of Continental handwriting. How it had found its way there so quickly, conspirators, who know how to stick threats to the walls of royal bedchambers with daggers, alone can tell. But Phoebe was no more surprised at finding it than, after the first start of recognition, she had been surprised to find her melodramatic lover himself at the door of Cautleigh Hall. Such things were the merest matters-of-course in her world, where wonderful events and startling coincidences are always happening to everybody four-and-twenty times a day. And she had read:

"You have surprise. But never mind. Only tell not, which I am. It is my life I trust to you. You shall know, all at the hour, whom I do here. Before I speak, you shall seem as if I am strange. S. A."

Truly, at last, the romance of life had come to Phoebe as it comes to few.

She was in a great country mansion,

large and remote enough to pass, without much help from fancy, for a feudal castle or baronial hall. Hither she had been sent by a stern and tyrannical father to be parted from the most romantic of lovers. Nothing had been forgotten, even down to the duenna, and to the brilliant company in the midst of which she was to feel herself alone.

But all these precautions had been in vain. Her lover had actually done what, ages ago, had occurred to her during some waking fancy. For her sake, and to rescue her, he had entered the castle disguised as a serving-man. How had he obtained his knowledge of where she was to be found? The question was absurd. Was heroine ever yet carried off, and not discovered by the hero, by some extraordinary coincidence, in the very nick of time? And then, "It is my life I trust to you." It would indeed be at the risk of his life that a hounded Polish exile should trust himself within the walls of the lords of the soil. For of course Sir Charles Bassett would be a trusted favourite of the Czar, and would be only too glad to find such an enemy as Stanislas Adrianski in his power. Nor am I at all sure that, if her notions of history and of international politics were hazy, they were very much more vague than those entertained by the majority of the lady guests at Cautleigh Hall. Hers, at any rate, meant something real to her mind, which was more than could be said for theirs.

The time was evidently drawing near when she would be called upon, in some unforeseen manner, to prove herself a heroine indeed. For that matter she was compelled to take the part of a heroine even now. Had it not been for the presence, beneath the same roof with herself, of her heroic lover, she felt disgracefully capable of forgetting that she was at Cautleigh Hall against her will, and of feeling well content that Count Stanislas Adrianski should be in the thick of a very far-off battle. But such contemptible behaviour had not been allowed to be hers. She was a heroine for whose sake a hero had dared death and dungeons under her very eyes—that hero who seemed now to be her irresistible doom. What would happen next? Perhaps—but the possibilities of such a perhaps are too long to reckon. They implied all the plots of all the plays and novels that Phoebe knew. Anything might happen next, now.

Meanwhile, though she, with all due

diligence, cultivated her consciousness of his presence, things were made easier for her by the very little which Stanislas—no doubt for the most heroic reasons—allowed her to see of him. At times, days together would pass without putting her self-possession to task by giving her a sight of the man who for love of her was putting his life in jeopardy; and, when she did see him, it was always in his capacity as Ralph Bassett's valet and before company. At such times she could not but admire this haughty noble's power of adapting himself to all the needs of the occasion. Nothing, indeed, could injure the effect of his sombre and melancholy dignity. But had he been a born valet, he could not have acted the part more perfectly. No doubt he had kept a dozen valets in his time, but only a genius for conspiracy could account for the manner in which he knew how to disarm every sort of suspicion. He never blundered, never forgot, he was never distraught; he had even the self-command to refrain from a glance in her direction that might possibly tell tales. It was upon Phoebe at last that the strained excitement of so barrenly brilliant a situation began to tell. She, too, set herself to play the part of being a mere common lady-guest of the house, just as the others were, and did not find it so very hard, doing what the others did as far as she could, and taking things as they came. But to live two lives at once is always hard, especially when the secret and unseen life is the more exciting of the two. No wonder Sir Charles, with his readiness at seeing through the backs of other people's cards, thought her a peculiar girl who was hiding something, and was not altogether what she seemed.

But at last a crisis came.

One morning she found two letters on her plate—one from her father, the other in an unknown hand. She knew what her father's would be: a cumbrously light chronicle of little things which could not possibly concern the inner life of a heroine, and that were, considering that they came from a tyrant to a prisoner, uncomfortably inappropriate and out of character. But from whom could the other be? So she opened the second first, and could not help her heart beating, or feeling that something in her look was treason to the secret of life and death which she was bound to guard. For thus it ran:

"I write with my left hand for fear of the spies. I am to myself this afternoon,

at four o'clock; and I will walk on the path to the little gate, and you will come. If you will not come, you do not know what will come, but when you come, then you will know. A."

Phoebe glanced round, half in fear lest her sudden confusion should have been observed. And her eyes met those of the count himself, who had come to speak to his master. And the count's dark deep-set eyes seemed to say: "Be silent—but come."

Possibly he had known, as servants will, that no house or out-door engagement would hamper Phoebe's movements on that short winter afternoon. As to that, she was herself of two minds. Romance bade her meet this hero of masks and mysteries, another feeling made her wish that the meeting might be rendered impossible for at least another day. The consciousness that he had put his life in peril for her sake was something to be proud of, and was nearly as delightful as it ought to be; but a sudden summons to complicate this simple relation by a stolen interview, perhaps to act, was a very different thing. Yet she never dreamed of doubting whether, if nothing happened to hinder her, she should go. On the contrary, the old shame at the very thought of doing anything cowardly, or ignoble, or in the least unworthy of an ideal heroine, inspired her to thrust away and trample down every other sort of shame. From her point of conscience, the clandestine meeting of an imprisoned girl with a disguised lover was the very crown and pinnacle of duty—an end that justified every means. And danger only doubled duty; danger to herself meant duty ten times told.

"Will four o'clock never come?" she asked her watch a hundred times, resolutely mistaking an instinctive dread of that fateful hour for impatient longing. But at last she heard the great house-clock itself strike four. "It must be fast," thought she, for her own watch still wanted ten minutes of the time, and she had been treating those very ten minutes as a reprieve. So she waited for fifteen minutes to make sure before hastening towards the little gate on love's wings. And then, at last, she cloaked herself and escaped from the house at a snail's pace, without having the good fortune to be met by Mrs. Hassock and her enquiries on the way. In spite of love, a straw would have turned her. But she was unopposed by so much as a blade of hay. She had

given destiny every chance, and destiny had refused to interfere.

There, already waiting for her, was the count, smoking a cigarette, with a successful air of waiting for nobody. He raised his hat as she appeared, and Phoebe could not help thinking that his original shabbiness suited his style far better than the brand-new clothes he wore at Cautleigh. Once more her heart beat a little, and she was glad of it, for she wanted to be glad to meet him very much indeed. He held out both his hands, but she had her hands in her muff, and, as the afternoon was cold, she kept them there. Of course she would die for him, but her hands had a will of their own.

"You are an angel!" exclaimed Stanislas. "You have not said one word, and you are come! and now——"

"Yes," said she. "But tell me—tell me at once—what all this mystery means; of course I know why you are here, but are you in such terrible danger? Is it true?"

"If I were not in danger, should I wear this disguise? It is true, mademoiselle. I have told you I was going to my country. Alas! once more, it was not to be. We were betrayed. We are always betrayed. And so I have to hide—to fly."

"And you are not safe—even here?"

"Nowhere is the head of Adrianski safe, my dear. It would not be safe under the very guillotine."

"Ah, then," said Phoebe, disappointed to feel relieved, "you did not know I was here at all?"

"That you was here?" asked Stanislas with an instant's hesitation on the words, and another instant's pause. "Ah! I was going to say, but you are so quick; I was going to say, but he will give her his head, and it shall be safe there."

Phoebe was vexed at feeling disappointed once more, and she sighed. The part of heroine must needs be delightful, but it seemed likely to prove a little hard. Still, if only for honour's sake, it must be played, and all the more since love needed so much spurring.

"Yes," said he, "I knew that you was here. If they have their spies, we have ours. Mademoiselle, my dear, there is nothing you can do I cannot know. You go to the theatre with an ancient man—who knows it? Adrianski, he is there. You go to live at a château—who knows? Adrianski, he is here again. You shall go to the top of the moon, and you shall find



Adrianski. Perhaps you shall see him prince, perhaps ramoneur, perhaps musician, perhaps valet, perhaps chiffonier, but Adrianski always the same. One day he shall sit at the table, yesterday he shall wait behind the chair. But always Adrianski, always me."

There was a time, before she knew that her name was Doyle, long before she had heard the name of Bassett, when these heroics would have seemed to her becoming in a gentleman. And she still accepted them as becoming in a hero; nothing more than their bloom had gone.

"Before we say another word more, tell me," said she, "what your danger is; tell me how I can help you. I am to be trusted as much as if I were a man, with a sword in my hand."

So she spoke and so she believed. But of how far her father would think her trustworthy, could he see her now in some magic mirror, she did not think at all.

"I know it," said Stanislas with a bow, and a rather meaningless wave of the arm. "And for because I know it, I said come. I am here because I love you, and because you love me. You have not always treat me well; but I never think you not true. You are not like that woman for whom I have killed a man. Mon Dieu, mademoiselle, for you I would not kill one—I would kill ten. Because you love me, I say come; because I say come, I tell you what to do. Attend then, my dear——"

"I like best the name you always used to call me by," said Phœbe.

"What name?"

"Mademoiselle."

"Pardon—I remember—I am valet now," said he, with a sadness of homage which made Phœbe feel remorseful for misplaced coldness and pride towards a hero in jeopardy. "But—never mind. All right—mademoiselle. I am in danger, mademoiselle, because I am patriot, and because I love you. I love my land, but more I love you. I fly because I am betrayed; because I love you, I fly here; because I love you I brush clothes, to see your eye who is a star. And if you are in trouble, or in a bother, for you to call, 'Stanislas à moi!' and for me to answer, 'Me voici—mademoiselle.' And what you can do for me? Nothing, mademoiselle, except but to say not who I am; and to trust me—with five pounds."

"You want—money?" asked Phœbe, at last surprised.

"Alas! mademoiselle, it is true. Every penny of the salary I receive I scorn to touch. It is degradation; I devote it to the gunpowder of the cannons of my unhappy patrie. The estate of the Adrianski, more than forty Cautleigh, is robbed to him by the Czar; every sou he had is given to the cause. Adrianski is a beggar to the woman what loves him. It is true. But no, not a beggar, mademoiselle. Adrianski gives himself; he is yours."

Phœbe searched for a precedent in vain. In all her large experience, no question of money had ever risen between a pair of lovers. Heroes and heroines were often poor, but to help one another with downright hard cash they were never known. Still there remained the facts that she was rich, and that the man who was daring death and Siberia for her sake was as penniless as he was proud.

"Is that all I can do for you?" asked she.

"That is all. At least—it is quite all. With five pounds I can act, for you—for me. You shall see what you shall see. But never mind. I ask no money for any common things. It is Poland who thanks you; it is the country whom you serve."

She removed one hand from her muff at last, and, after a battle with her cloak, found her purse with two five-pound notes in it, and gave one of these to the cause of Poland. Stanislas took it in what is held to be the most gentlemanly fashion—that is to say with an absent air, as if he did not know that he was taking it at all.

"When it is need to meet," said he, "I shall not write, nor shall you. If I want you, I shall wear my pin of my cravat who is like what you call a knock—like so," he said, closing one fist. "And you shall wear those earrings which is in you now when you want me; and if the answer is to touch the shoulder, so, then we shall meet here to this hour at that day. The knocks, the rings, the shoulder—so. We must be secret; we must conspire. We are together, we two."

They parted, but not like lovers. Phœbe felt angry with herself at feeling coldly when her part demanded all her fervour. Stanislas was evidently too high-minded a gentleman not to respect a woman's moods. But though he had displayed so many admirable traits of character, considering the shortness of the interview, she was by no means satisfied. There were hundreds of things he might have said, even in that short while, that he



did not say. Only one thing was clear—the hero of her romance was in pressing need and in utmost danger, and that his safety depended upon her silence and might depend upon her courage before things were at an end.

The plot was thickening. If only she could work herself up to care enough whether Count Stanislas Adrianski were sent to Siberia or no! But in any case, his going there must be no fault of hers. And if only the danger, and therefore the heroism of her hero could seem to her deepest heart quite so real as she resolutely believed them to be—but then, if she kept on trying very hard, no doubt the care and the deeper seeming would come. She must not fail in the duties of a heroine merely because she was weak and they were hard. How she would scorn herself in a book, if she failed!

These were her thoughts when there happened to her the very last thing of which she was thinking.

She found herself face to face with the wicked and desperate lover—the mortal enemy who knew Stanislas, and with whom her true lover's life would not be safe for an hour. She had, at a moment's notice, to find courage and action indeed. And she was so bewildered that she knew not what to do or what to say.

## A TRAVELLER'S TALES.

### A SAPPHIRE

IN the wanderings of which a reader of these "Tales" has had so many hints, one picks up many precious stones, literally and metaphorically. I should not value the companionship of a man who did not like to see, and handle, and own jewels. He must needs be a creature without fancy, excellent may be in all prosaic capacities, of thorough business habits, a zealous churchwarden, an efficient chairman of the local board. But if gems have no fascination for him, I should not care to travel in his company, or even to sit beside him at dinner. Observe that I do not speak of wearing jewellery, but of owning and admiring jewels. That attraction is strong on myself and on all persons for whose brain and heart combined I have respect. He who loved the Arabian Nights when young, and all the dainty records of fairyland, imbibed the glamour which never wears away.

At different times of my life, returning from one country or another, I have owned

— not for long — a pretty little heap of pearls, emeralds, and diamonds. At present, I think, my only treasure of this sort is a small handful of turquoises, brought from Candahar, of trifling value.

I own a sapphire, however, a very handsome stone, to which I have clung like an Englishman, "in spite of all temptation," for eighteen years. I bought it in Cairo, at Shepherd's Hotel—the old, historic, uncomfortable caravanserai, which was burnt down. The vendor was a young fellow-countryman, just returned from the Nile voyage. At that time it was roughly smoothed and polished in the native manner, which exposed not a quarter of its beauties. I recollect very well that I gave him nine pounds for it, but, since the gem has been twice re-cut, it is worth several times that figure, I believe. This young traveller gave me a story with it, which has almost slipped my memory. In those happy times I did not own a notebook, and it would be impossible to say how much of the following narrative is his, and how much my own imagination has unconsciously added. I have put the legend into the first person for convenience sake; you may suppose it a story told by one boy to another in the verandah of Shepherd's Hotel, when the golden sunset is fading duskily over the Ezbekieh, and the tinsel lights of the cafés are beginning to gleam under the acacias.

We lay one evening off a town which was either Manfaloot or Osioot, I am not sure. There were white walls about it, which descended almost to the river-bank, with domes above them rosy in the declining sun, and dark-green palm-trees, fretted with gold along the edges of their leaves. Francisco, our dragoman, did his best to dissuade me from landing, as was the habit of that worthy man. He insisted on the danger, real enough, you know—this was in 1863—of being belated in the narrow unlit streets, where nothing stirred after sunset but dogs and robbers and outcasts. But I longed to stretch my legs on shore, and the mosques seemed handsome. So a guide was sought, and presently appeared an ugly, dirty old Copt, arrayed in a night-gown and a blue and scarlet turban. Of all beards that ever grew on human chin, this fellow had the longest and filthiest; a mat it was, an unnatural growth. And he had only one eye.

Led by the guide, who spoke a few words of English, I strolled through the

empty bazaars; fought some lively skirmishes with dogs; saw the outside of a mosque or two; and visited a coffee-shop, where the faithful eyed me silently askance. Whilst drinking the blessed preparation which I thought mud, though I pretended to like it for "form's" sake, night settled down, and the Copt became uneasy. He led me back by another route, an alley dark as a coal-mine, under a lofty wall; preferring that way, he said, "because dogs bite," a reason vague, but intelligible on reflection. I learned that the high wall on our left was that of the pasha's grounds. The one-eyed Calender informed me that he could get permission to visit them next day, for a baksheesh of two liras. Thirty-six shillings seemed too much to pay for a stroll through a burnt-up garden, but my crafty Copt assured me that the ladies of the pasha's harem were occasionally espied therein. Of course, he told a falsehood, and I knew it, but who would not catch at the off-chance, when twenty-one years old?

Suddenly, as we stumbled on, for we carried no lantern, my way was blocked by a human form, which met me breast to breast. I cried humorously, like the donkey-boys: "Riglak, Effendi! Shumalek, oh, Sheikh!" and tried to pass. But a sharp word of command, the thud and rattle of arms grounded, brought me to halt. Half-a-dozen lanterns flashed out suddenly, and I saw the narrow passage full of troops. It was the patrol, and I stood face to face with the officer, a fair-haired man, very soldierly in his blue tunic and silver lace. By the lantern his orderly displayed, he looked me over, smiled, and glanced beyond. The Copt shrank back, whilst the officer passed me with an unfinished salute, and spoke with him a moment. One seemed eager, the other embarrassed. After a few low words, the young Turk seized my follower by his most venerable beard, drew that ancient countenance to his, and—how shall I put it? He treated my Copt as Antonio treated the Jew.

The action was so insolently droll that I laughed out. Without apology, I snatched the lantern, lighted a cigar thereat, and turned. At a word from the officer his men fell back, saluted, and we passed through. The Copt offered no explanation of this incident. In answer to my questions he muttered that Turks are very cruel and hard upon his nation. Next morning the wind was fair.

Several weeks afterwards, halting at the same town, I remembered the pasha's garden, and the marvels to be seen therein. My former guide arrived, but he did not show so much confidence about obtaining a permit. Some scandals had been discovered, he hinted, at the Konak. "What scandals?" I asked, but the Copt did not know. He was a poor man, and with the effendi's permission he would now retire, to see what could be arranged. At night time, whilst I supped upon the poop, a small procession of lantern-bearers issued from the narrow street and halted. My dragoman presently informed me that the Kislar Aga, or some such personage, desired a few moments' converse. I had no objection, but it presently appeared that the Kislar Aga expected me to attend on him. Taking a bottle by the neck, I peered over the rail, and distinguished the creature amidst his slaves below.

"If the Kislar Aga does not come on board within three minutes," I cried, "I will throw this bottle at his head."

Heaven knows what message Francisco delivered, but within the time I saw before me a tall, lean, wrinkled being, with the face of a peevish old woman who gives herself airs. His flowing dress was handsome, he wore jewels on every finger, and conspicuous in his turban was the peculiar sign of office. I took his offered hand with repugnance. Francisco translated.

"His lordship the pasha sends compliments. If you wish to see the harem gardens, you must be at the gate by sunrise."

And forthwith the Kislar Aga departed. "What did he come for?" I asked of Francisco.

"To see if all was square, sir. There's been something wrong in the harem. I have agreed to pay one lira for baksheesh."

The Copt had asked two.

Next morning I was punctual. A guard of Nubian soldiers stood at the Konak gate, and presented arms. We traversed a dingy courtyard, full of ragged suitors, passed through a small door at the corner, and entered the gardens under charge of two or three eunuchs. There was little to see, of course. Flowers grew in a tangle where shallow ditches moistened the earth. The space was mostly occupied by shrubberies and thickets, intersected by winding walks. Here and there stood a statue of surprising deformity. The art of child-

hood, displayed upon a turnip with a dinner-knife, comes nearest to the style of thing set out here for the ladies' delectation. Through the midst of the grounds ran a turbid canal, shaded by fine trees and clumps of bamboo. It widened at the centre to a pool, embanked with marble, chipped and stained. Steps led down to the water. In the middle of the tank rose a wooden kiosk, gaily painted; but its shutters were closed, and the bridge leading to it had locked gates. Some windows on the ground floor of the palace stood open. I saw rooms sparsely but handsomely furnished, in satin and gold embroidery. Glass chandeliers hung from the ceiling, and the walls were lined with mirrors. Those windows had been opened to impress me with a glimpse of the magnificence within, but I knew very well that this luxury was atoned by sordid wretchedness in the apartments not displayed. The ladies were invisible, of course.

Not disappointed, for I had expected little, I returned, after leaving a card and a courteous acknowledgment for the pasha. Reaching the dabeah, I found upon my table a small iron box, and summoned Francisco to explain. But a slender handsome man in Turkish uniform appeared from the inner cabin, and said earnestly, in perfect French:

"I put myself under your protection, sir! If you dare venture to help a man in desperate straits, I implore you to hoist sail."

In astonishment and boyish delight I gave the order, and my men, fortunately, were all aboard. A few minutes after we were scudding briskly down the river, and I returned to the saloon.

"The pasha has a steamboat," I said, "and the telegraph."

"There is a chance that he may not pursue me, and life is worth a struggle. What have I not gone through in these last hours! Your crimson flag to me was like a thread of sunshine in a black sky."

"But at Cairo," I observed, "you will certainly be taken."

"No! My papers are all in order. Besides, once we reach Cairo, if I demanded the pasha's head, it would be served me. You have asked no questions before extending your kindness to a poor soldier, but I will tell you the story as soon as I have swallowed my heart, which sticks in my throat at present."

All day and all that night my guest sat on the poop, watching the rapid river and

the mud-built villages. Instead of anchoring at dusk, we kept on, urging the crew with a promise of baksheesh. When the forenoon following passed without alarm, my protégé recovered heart. He broke into snatches of song, slapped the one-eyed reis upon the back—all reises, and most other Egyptians, are one-eyed—and convulsed my valet with unintelligible jests. A being less Turkish in his ways could not be imagined, and I asked his nation.

"I am a Genoese," he said, laughing and colouring; "but call me Yusooef Agha."

"Have we not met before?"

"I thought you would not recognise me. Yes, I have to apologise for my treatment of your guide, but you do not know what a villain he is. After dinner, if you like, I will tell you why I am escaping."

He did so, with many reservations, doubtless. I never learnt how Yusooef came to embrace Islam, nor anything about him, excepting this adventure. It may be confessed that his manner of telling it did not lead me to take an absorbing interest in his history; but I should like now to hear the beginning and the end of this renegade.

"You cannot fancy," he began, "the monotonous misery of life in these Nile towns. There is nothing for the virtuous man to do save pray and smoke and pray again, and foretell the re-conquest of the world by Islam. I am a good Mussulman"—here he winked and laughed—"but I had not the fortune to be bred to these delights, and they pall. Before I had been a week in yonder garrison I wanted to die—oh, seriously! But one nail drives out another, and before I was quite bored to death I found amusement.

"Two or three days running, wherever I went in the afternoon, I met a certain negress. One knows that sort of thing, and as soon I was sure, I gave her an opportunity to speak.

"'Effendi,' she said, 'a beautiful lady has seen you, and her soul is melting like wax,' etc.—you know.

"I expressed polite regrets to hear of this disaster, and asked if the lady was married. No; her young charms were like those of the plane-tree. And so on. I recalled as much poetry suited to the occasion as my studies could supply at a moment's notice, and hoped to hear again when convenient. But before retiring my black Hebe produced a little gage d'amour,



which would have warmed a chillier temperament.

"'Allah!' I exclaimed, 'it is no kefaji's daughter who sends a present like that! Who is your mistress?'

"The slave drew herself away saucily.

"'She will tell you when she thinks proper, I suppose.'

"I might have waited; but it is always well to know beforehand with whom one sits down to a game. Very few unmarried girls in a place like that could spare such jewels. But it is dangerous, as you know, to ask questions bearing in the most remote degree upon the womankind of a family. At length I remembered your Copt, who, let me tell you, is as vile a wretch as could be found in Egypt. He pretends to live by acting as guide, but his real pursuits are vastly more lucrative. The most honest of them is to sell antique gems, which he imports from Paris, and not the most abominable is to trade in secrets. The poorest fallahéen all stand in his debt, and he crushes them betwixt the upper and the nether millstone. But I did not know him then.

"This rascal was delighted to give me details about every family in the town. There was more than a chance that something in his way would come of it. The knowledge that my *bonne fortune* was unmarried simplified the enquiry. I found that she could only be a daughter of the pasha's. He had two of marriageable years, the elder affianced to my colonel, the other, Nuzleh, still unattached. The Copt knew all about them, their appearance, character, and tastes. Both, he said, were very handsome, but the elder was bold and self-reliant, whilst Nuzleh had a timid disposition, very rare amongst Moslem women.

"A day or two afterwards the slave carried me another message. Her mistress would visit a stall in the bazaar at a certain time, and she begged me to be about the spot. I obeyed. The lady was punctual, of course, and I had no trouble in recognising her amongst the others. If this poor head of mine were capable of forming a prudent resolution and sticking to it, I should have broken off the adventure there and then. For she never took her eyes from me until I fled in alarm. But they were such beautiful eyes! Next day, as I stood thinking of them under the palace walls, a flower dropped upon me from above. No one was by. I let my gauntlet fall and picked it up.

But I prayed Allah to grant my beauty some slight gift of caution, since my own share is limited. And meantime I did not lounge beneath the palace wall again.

"Some hours after, the negress handed me a note. I could not read one half of it, and she could not help me. I swore the Copt to secrecy by all the gods who ever ruled in Egypt, and he deciphered it. The letter contained only verses and girlish nonsense. I got a poetry-book and wrote the answer; but when the messenger came for it she brought another, just a second edition, but in clearer writing. So things went on for several weeks. I was not so impatient as you would suppose, for with every other letter came a jewel.

But things could not remain at this point. Making love by correspondence, at the risk of your neck, is a fashion out of date. The negress saw matters with my eyes, for she ran almost as great danger in carrying these harmless notes as in introducing me into the Konak. But Nuzleh did not even think of a pleasure greater than writing verses. She was rather compelled than persuaded to let the slave tell her name. To my suggestions for an interview the silly child made no reply at all, but transmitted me her evening dreams and morning raptures, her impressions at noon and her visions at midnight, with an obstinate volubility which would have been droll had it not been so dangerous. I began to be bored. The volumes of poetry which I could borrow were nearly all used up in our correspondence. So I wrote in plain prose that a man gets tired of making love to an abstraction; that I would receive no more letters until I had seen her. For a whole week there was silence, and I kept on my guard, for female pique runs naturally to daggers and poisons. Then came the answer. Amidst reams of poetry I learned that if I was so cruel she would obey, but how the meeting could be brought about her innocent mind was incapable of devising."

The autobiographical form is wearisome; having shown my guest's cynical manner of telling his story, I will drop it.

The maid proved to be as uningenious as the mistress. It is generally supposed that for cases of this sort women have more wit and courage than their lovers, but it was not so here. If they tried, they did not succeed in devising a plan for the interview, and Yusoof, of course, was absolutely unacquainted with the premises and

the habits of the harem. For the pasha, so liberal to foreigners—who would gratefully report of him at Cairo—suffered no native to enter his gardens. Once more Yusoof resolved to let the matter drop, but those compromising letters still arrived, and he had no lover-like pretext for stopping them. The pasha's daughter could be terribly mischievous if she liked, without resort to violence. At his wit's end, Yusoof applied to the Copt, keeping back only the lady's name. That useful being saw no difficulty at all.

"Can you swim?" said he.

"Like a fish."

"Under water?"

"Like a moor-hen!"

Thereupon the Copt revealed that no sentries guarded the canal, that the patrol was a mere ceremony. If the lady did her part with discretion, the lover risked nothing besides a midnight bath. Suspicious of everyone at Cairo, the pasha thought himself in safety here. Yusoof did not by any means regret the absence of danger. He told his plan and received the lady's trembling assent. Only, the meeting could not take place in her apartment, where a nurse but too faithful attended day and night. Consulted once more, the Copt was ready. He named the kiosk in the tank, which always stood unlocked, saving on those rare occasions when the garden was visited by foreigners.

On the first moonless night, Yusoof gained the bank of the canal, dived noiselessly beneath the arch, and swam under water as far as he was able. Rising to breathe where the shadows lay blackest, in two or three long stretches he reached the pool. Here, to gain the most sheltered place for landing, it was necessary to pass half round the island, a fatiguing effort. He landed at the further steps, and looked round cautiously. No light glimmered through the shutters of the kiosk, no one moved within. But the windows of the palace were all illuminated, throwing a perilous glare between the trees. Perplexed, angry, and alarmed, Yusoof made up his mind to return, when a figure suddenly appearing on the bridge struck him motionless with fear. It stopped a few paces from him, and whispered, in tones quivering with fright:

"Are you there?"

Yusoof recognised the negress, and approached her cautiously. She opened a door. It was pitch dark inside.

"Where is the Lady Nuzleh?" asked Yusoof, halting.

"There, there, for goodness sake go in!"

Thus encouraged, the lover poured forth to his invisible divinity the rapturous salutation which he had composed for this event. For European critics the effect would have been most seriously injured by a sneeze, but they hold other opinions on this score in the East. The lady revealed her presence by a sweetly murmured

"Allah make it good to you!" but her politeness ended in a sob.

The meeting seems to have been vastly droll in Yusoof's opinion. Shivering in wet clothes, he played the castanet between his tender protestations. The fair one's answers were unintelligible, and her stalwart negress, holding the lover by his hand, forbade him to approach. Not ten minutes the interview lasted, and Yusoof vowed betwixt oaths and laughter, as he noiselessly slipped into the pool, that such a stupid entertainment was not worth a cold in the head, much more a life.

For several weeks, the memory of this ridiculous adventure made him deaf to all advances. Fools and children, he told the slave, ought not to play at intrigue, which is an amusement for grown persons. Then it was rumoured through the town that there was sickness in the Konak, and presently an old woman visited the captain's quarters. She brought a message of such blind, self-sacrificing love as touched me when I heard even Yusoof's careless rendering. Nuzleh had taken her old nurse into confidence, and she, poor creature, fearing lest the child should die, consented to everything. Yusoof's resolution failed, and his visits were many.

You think that the tragedy is coming now, but it was still deferred. The weeks passed by, and Nuzleh's elder sister was to be married to the colonel. His officers prepared the customary presents. Yusoof, deeply in debt to the money-lenders of Cairo, and to anyone who would accommodate him, could only raise the needful cash by selling some jewel which Nuzleh had given him. Upon the day when I arrived he took it to the Copt, who, in the afternoon, left at the barracks an amount representing one-twentieth of its value, or thereabouts. You will remember that we met beneath the Konak wall. Yusoof charged the Copt with his trickery, and

was told that if he did not like the price the colonel would give more, no doubt, to recover his bride's ring; for he supposed her the guilty sister. The incident that followed, I have told. The Copt sought no vengeance at this time.

The colonel was married, and gossips began to whisper of a match far more grand for Nuzleh. Messengers passed to and from Cairo, until, at length, it was officially made known that a prince of the blood had asked for the pasha's youngest daughter. Women have no small voice in their own affairs out yonder, and in a common case, Nuzleh's objections would have been seriously entertained. But this alliance was too honourable to be delayed for a young girl's fancy. Her vehement protest caused suspicion, but the preparations went on.

During the night before my second visit, an inevitable discovery was made. The ladies of the harem opened Nuzleh's jewel-box, to see what parures she needed for her grand trousseau; and they found it empty. What followed nobody can tell. Before sunrise, a letter with a stone attached fell on Yusoof's bed, and told him in one word to fly. He rose instantly, packed his valuables in a box which he hid beneath his cloak, and escaped to my dabeah, by the least frequented ways. On his road he met the Copt, also avoiding observation. He was robbed in his best, and his face was set towards the Konak. Yusoof guessed his errand. Something had reached the usurer's ears, and he was hastening to sell his knowledge. Had Yusoof doubted, the old man's conduct would have betrayed him. He fell upon his knees, and my protégé, with great presence of mind, as he expressed it, slung the heavy box, and crashed it on his skull. Leaving the body there, he gained my boat without encountering anyone.

We reached Cairo safely, and I bade adieu to my passenger without reluctance. Two days afterwards he called, no longer Yusoof Agha, but Yusoof Bey. Whatever the offence which caused his banishment, it was forgiven. He gave me this sapphire; I suppose it had belonged to that poor girl.

A few days after, the newspapers announced her arrival. She came with her father and a big retinue, to be married to the prince. The ceremonies in such a case are long, but they came to a sad termination. Nuzleh died, how, under what circumstances, no one can tell.

## WHAT IS LEFT OF MERRIE ENGLAND.

No one can look through the columns of an old calendar without noting how many of our old feasts and fasts have fallen into desuetude, and no one can read records of old English life without remarking how utterly most of our old habits and customs have either been altered or have disappeared. And, it may be noticed, this abolitionary movement has not been in gradual operation, but has been the active growth of the last half century. A very much greater gulf divides us from our grandfathers at the beginning of the present century, than existed between them and their ancestors a couple of centuries previously.

With the astounding changes brought about in our social constitution during the past fifty years, the national character seems to have undergone a complete transformation. The typical Englishman was a stern, solid being, yet in his nature there was a strange love of trivialities, a fondness for old habits and institutions which in our eyes appears almost childish in its simplicity. But the revolutions brought about in the sciences of locomotion and communication have altered him, and the typical Englishman of to-day affords by no means so strong a contrast to typical men of other races as he did. He has sentiment, and plenty of it, but he accords it a proper time and place, and does not allow it to interweave itself with the routine of everyday life. The business of life is his great occupation, the pleasure of life is a conditional consequence, and if he relapses into anything like old fashioned enjoyment, the act is one of condescension, and by no means to be invested with any importance.

Fifty years ago England was yet Merrie England, although the hands of the innovator and the destroyer were beginning to be felt. Customs hallowed by the observance of many hundred years still obtained in most of the country towns and villages, and it would have been deemed sacrilege and vandalism to have even hinted at their abolition. With the dawning of the present era of invention, however, the state of matters underwent a sudden and thorough change, and although, as we shall endeavour to show, some old remnants yet exist, they exist solely upon sufferance, are regarded simply as curiosities, and are not attended in their performance by an atom of the old spirit.



Strange to say, it is in our mighty, practical, commonplace London that we find the most rigid adherence to old customs. And next to London, come the north and the west of England. That they should still exist amongst the big manufacturing towns and the grimy mining districts of the north causes us but little less surprise than that they should still flourish in London, but that they should still be found in the west is not so astonishing, inasmuch as the west has always been the most primitive part of our isle. Elsewhere almost every vestige of the old days in the shape of festivals and customs has disappeared. In fact it may be said without making too sweeping an assertion that of all the innumerable anniversaries religiously observed by our ancestors, Christmas Day alone preserves its ancient position. Twelfth Night is little more than a name; Valentine's Day has sadly degenerated; Easter is simply marked by a holiday; May Day is but the first of May; whilst Candlemas Day, Palm Sunday, St. George, St. Agnes' Eve, Collop Monday, Hock Day, St. Mark's Eve, Midsummer Day, Lammas Day, Michaelmas Day, Martinmas, and St. Thomas's Day—all, in the old times, very notable feasts—have completely sunk into oblivion. New Year's Eve, the Fifth of November, and Hallowe'en are yet marked days, but are sadly shorn of their old attributes.

In the City of London, however, many of them still live, and, strange to say, without showing any signs of debility. This may be accounted for by the fact that although the population of the City after nightfall is very far short of many of our third-rate provincial towns, the relics of its ancient grandeur in the shape of guilds and companies, with their traditions and their wealth, still exist. For instance, on Plough Monday the Lord Mayor and sheriffs still go in procession to the Court of Exchequer, there to witness the cutting of a faggot of sticks, and the counting of six horseshoes and sixty-one hob-nails, as tenants of certain estates. On Maunday Thursday the poor of the City still receive the royal bounty in the shape of specially coined money. On Easter Monday and Tuesday the Spital sermons are still preached in Christ Church, Newgate, in the presence of the civic dignitaries and the blue-coat boys, who afterwards proceed to the Mansion House to receive their guineas and shillings, buns and wine. On Ascension Day the boys still beat the bounds of the parishes; the pancake is still tossed at Westminster School

on Shrove Tuesday; the vaults of the Parliament House are still searched on the Fifth of November; and, greatest of all, the Lord Mayor's procession still obstructs the traffic of the streets on the ninth of the same month.

Besides these, there are innumerable observances still adhered to by the City Guilds, such as the annual dining together of the Skinners and Merchant Taylors in commemoration of an ancient feud for precedence; the procession of the Salters' Company to the church of St. Magnus; the trial of the Pyx at the Hall of the Goldsmiths; and the boat race for Doggett's coat and badge on Lammas Day.

But, when we get well out of the reach of the metropolis, when we penetrate obscure, sequestered regions where most we should expect to see some reflection of the old life, we are disappointed. It is a hopeless task to seek for information upon the subject of old manners and customs amongst the rustics. And indeed it may be noted, that where such customs do exist—except in the parts of England before alluded to—their existence is owing, not to the enthusiasm and inherited reverence of the rustic folk for them, but to the efforts of some local grandee or ardent antiquary. In Kent and the eastern counties, formerly happy hunting-grounds for lovers of old-world customs, manners, and habits, the very names of the old festivals are almost forgotten—the reason given being the proximity of the metropolis. Jack in the Green and Guy Fawkes are becoming rarer every year; farmers do not wassail their apple-trees on New Year's Eve; lads and lasses no longer keep watch at the church porch on St. Mark's Eve; pleasure fairs have been swept away; and in some districts the belfries do not even welcome the New Year. And with the old feasts and holidays have disappeared many pleasing little domestic customs, many harmless bits of superstition, and much that made country life seem Arcadian even if it were really not so.

But when we go north, especially into the counties of Northumberland, Lancashire, and Durham, and into the west, especially into Devon and Cornwall, we are as agreeably surprised as we have been disappointed elsewhere.

No Devonshire farmer could hope for a prosperous New Year unless on Christmas Eve he wassailed his apple-trees. In Herefordshire, farmers still light fires in the wheat fields on Twelfth Night.

Candlemas Day is religiously observed in the north. Shrove Tuesday is more or less marked all over England, but especially in the west. Carling Sunday—the fourth in Lent—is as universally celebrated by feasts of peas and butter in the north as is Christmas Day by the consumption of plum-pudding in the south. In Durham no nail is ever driven in on Good Friday, and in Yorkshire the earth is never stirred upon that day, although in Devonshire good luck is secured by so doing, whilst both in the north and the west it is considered auspicious to see the sun rise on Good Friday. Easter, celebrated in the south simply by making holiday and sending complimentary cards, is a “high time” in the north. Easter eggs are exchanged between all classes, and “Tansy Pudding” is a feature at all tables. “Lifting” men, by the women, is invariably performed, and every one who can afford to do so, appears in brand-new clothing. April fooling is perhaps universal, although confined in the south to juveniles; but in the north the “most potent, grave, and reverend seigniors” do not deem it beneath their dignity to send folk “April gowking.” May Day in the north and west is still a great festival, and even in one or two Kentish villages the writer has seen the old-fashioned May-pole. In Gloucestershire cheeses are still decorated and carried in procession, and in Cornwall children go their rounds with May dolls. Here and there upon St. John’s Day fires are still kindled in the fields for good luck, and love-sick maidens in the north still test the qualities of hemp-seed. Michaelmas goose is still generally eaten, and harvest suppers are amongst the most universally preserved relics of old days. Hallowe’en in the north is observed by the old rites of dipping for apples and watching burning nuts, and Christmas observances are too well known to require detailed mention.

Thus briefly we have endeavoured to recapitulate the principal festivals which have escaped the obliterating tendency of the age. Each year sees, if not the disappearance, at least the waning of one or more, and the proportion of those which exist to those which gained for our land the epithet of “Merrie” is infinitesimal, but it is pleasant to cherish them, few though they be.

Domestic usages of old-time origin, and superstitions peculiar to certain places, seem to fight harder for existence than the fixed feasts. A very striking instance of loss,

however, is to be noted in the almost complete disappearance of the old English ballad. In Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, old songs and old rhymes are sung and recited on every hillside and in every chimney corner. The ballad-singer is still a common visitor, and children, long before they can read, learn to lisp verses which were familiar to their forefathers hundreds of years ago. In England we search in vain for the genuine ballad. Antiquaries and bibliophiles have happily preserved many in the printed shape, but to hear them sung, to the old tunes and in the old manner, is as rare as it is to hear the curfew. Even among sailors, as a rule the most ardent conservatives of old manners and superstitions, the popular taste for maudlin sentiment and idiotic buffoonery, has supplanted the fine old sea song. The modern tar, fine fellow as he is, prefers the latest music-hall atrocity, or the newest whining love song, to *The Death of Nelson*, or *The Saucy Arethusa*, or *Tom Bowling*, with his pipe at grog time.

But the loss is yet more apparent in the country. One might expect occasionally to hear during the long winter evenings in the parlours of the village inns an old song of the country side; one might expect to come across old crones and aged labourers with some remembrance, however imperfect, of the minstrelsy of their youth, but, with the exception of a few harvest-songs, and one or two west-country ballads, the result is disappointment. How many Lincolnshire peasants know a verse of *The Poacher*? How many clowns throughout the broad lands of Yorkshire can join in *The Farmer’s Son*? How many Sussex men have ever heard their famous county *Whistling Song*? Where in Worcestershire would be heard *The Hunter of Bromsgrove*? Where in Gloucestershire *George Riddler’s Oven*? Even from the north the old ballad seems to have departed, although *Earl Brand* and *Old Adam* may sometimes be heard in very out-of-the-way districts. In the west old ballads linger together with old habits and old customs, and the fact may be sometimes even regretted, when the tired traveller finds himself condemned to sit and listen to the twenty or thirty verses of a local song, droned forth without the omission of a single word, and aware that the smallest interruption would be deemed, both by singer and audience, an insult. Notable amongst these west-country ditties are *The Three Knights*, *The Jolly*

Waggoner, and the ever popular Richard of Taunton Dean, and these may often yet be heard, especially in the wild country around Dartmoor and on the Somersetshire border, sung as they have always been sung since the olden time, with a deep chorus of bass voices, and followed by the invariable clatter of the cider-mugs upon the table.

Occasionally, amongst gipsies and tramps, one may pick up an old song or fragment of a song, but the individuals from whom one expects to learn most—the village philosophers, the “wise men,” the oldest inhabitants, the intelligent peasants—know nothing, and what is more disappointing, care nothing about them. The parson of a Kentish rural district informed the writer not very long ago that he had endeavoured to cultivate good old English music amongst his humble parishioners by forming a singing-class, whereat the songs of Bishop, Arne, Purcell, and the sixteenth-century catches and ballads were practised. In less than a month his class had dwindled from thirty to five members, and on asking the reason was told in the purest Kent dialect—just the dialect of the old songs and romances—that the villagers wanted the new songs; they cared not for old-fashioned, out of date affairs, but were athirst for “something civilised.”

Amongst other characteristic features of old English rural life, the loss of which must go so much to the hearts of all true lovers of the Merrie England of bygone days, are the sports and games. Less than half a century back, almost every part of England was famous for some particular sport. Thus, Northumbrians were great quoit and bowl players, Cumberland and Westmoreland men were mighty wrestlers—a supremacy they divided with Devonshire and Cornwall. Berkshire and Wiltshire men were proud of their stick-play, Yorkshire men of their horse-racing and their sword-dancing, the Fen-country men of their skating and pole-leaping, Essex men of their running, Nottingham men of archery, Surrey and Sussex men of their bar and weight throwing, and Kentish men of their cricket. In some parts the old county partiality still lingers, for we know that Cumberland, Westmoreland, Devonshire, and Cornwall men to this day would rather lose a half week's work than miss a “wrestle;” that at one or two old Wiltshire fairs stick-play in the style of two centuries back may yet be seen; that the Fen men can still hold their own with all comers

at skating, but the universality of these pastimes has disappeared. Probably, taken as individuals, Englishmen of the upper classes are far more athletic than they ever were in the days of Merrie England. Cricket, football, rackets, and rowing are now cultivated in a hundred places where they were cultivated then in one, but it would be difficult to find a more anti-athletically inclined rural population than is ours at the present day.

Many reasons are adduced for this, two or three alone of which are worthy of notice. It is said that with the spread of railway communication, the inhabitants of secluded country districts, being less dependent upon their own resources, find it more agreeable to seek diversion at the nearest town; that time needs less killing than it did owing to the cheap rate at which amusement and diversion are afforded by professionals. It is said that the present strict observance of the Sunday has much to do with the disappearance of old English sports and pastimes; that what was fifty years ago accounted legitimate diversion, is now set down as a crime. And it is said that the enormous increase in the number of country horse race meetings has allured the simple rustic away from his primitive sports with the temptation of winning money without personal exertion.

Branches of sport which were patronised from the sheer love of the thing, have now become professions. We have before us a “Programme of Diversions to be held in the Common Field of the Parish of Bromley in Kent,” for the year 1770. Many—indeed most—of these “Diversions” scarcely live nowadays even in the name. Where, in the length and breadth of this England of to-day, should we find prizes offered for “Dancing in couples and in singles,” “Grinning through the collar,” “Back-sword fighting for single men,” “Throwing the iron bar,” “Jingling,” “Tilting, at the Quintain on horseback,” and “Footracing for maidens?” And, be it noted, these “Diversions” were advertised to take place “on the first Sunday in May.” Imagine the face of the worthy pastor of Bromley in this year of grace 1882, were such an advertisement to be handed round amongst his parishioners! Many of the “good old sports,” such as bear-baiting, cock-fighting, dog-fighting, prize-fighting, ratting, and hen-pelting, we can of course well spare, but a great deal of Sunday soaking at public houses would be avoided, if the popular conscience could be made a



little more elastic, and the popular veneration for Mrs. Grundy a little tempered.

Coming to old customs and habits of a more domestic nature, we find that they still exist to a great extent in the northern and western portions of England. In the north, especially amidst the great Black Country, they are almost universal, whilst in the Midlands and the south they seem to have disappeared. Many of these customs come within the category of superstitions, but they are none the less interesting, as tending to disprove the assertion that "the further north one goes, the less sentiment one finds." A few instances will suffice.

In the north, no child's nails are ever cut on a Sunday; no infant's nails are cut until it has attained the age of one year, but are bitten; the inside of a child's hands are never washed until three weeks after birth; infants before they are carried downstairs are always taken upstairs, in order to ensure their course in the world upwards; no child is shown itself in the glass, or its teething process will be painful; cake is always given to the first person met on the road to the christening; marriage should never be performed on a Saturday, but always, if possible, on a Wednesday; the person who sleeps first on the wedding night will die first, as will the person who kneels first at the marriage ceremony. In Cornwall no miner whistles underground; a Cornish child born after midnight will see more of the world than ordinary folk, and Sunday is considered an especially lucky day for birth.

We might swell this list to very formidable proportions, but the subject has been so well handled by recent writers on folk-lore, that we should be open to the accusation of trespass and plagiarism. The hours, the days, the months, the movements of the heavenly bodies, the actions of animals and birds, the various aspects of Nature, are laid under contribution by popular rural superstition, and it is a most astonishing fact that notwithstanding the wholesale disappearance of old feasts and festivals, so much real ignorant belief should still sway the bucolic mind. Pixies in Devonshire and Brownies in the north are still revered and dreaded as actual beings. Refinement and civilisation have put a stop to the burning of witches, but the newspaper columns of the past twenty years contain many accounts of the duckings and persecutions they have been subjected to in secluded villages. There are few country places of any extent without a wise woman or seer. Quack doctors

yet drive a roaring trade at the few existing country fairs.

As for the belief in ghosts and spirits, it is almost universal, and by no means confined to rural districts, as those who have had a lengthened experience of the British domestic servant full well know.

Bacon remarked that "men fear death as children fear to go in the dark," but amongst our rustic population there are stalwart labourers, who have the Queen's Medal in their cottages, and who would brave a hundred deaths on the field of battle rather than pass a certain stile or a certain dark bit of wood after sundown.

And so our world goes on. The noble savage is a being of the past, as capable of appreciating a whisky-cocktail, and a suit of dress clothes, as the best of his civilised brethren; the last romantic corners of the globe are being hunted up and spoiled. Old London is disappearing every day, and when the last Lord Mayor's Show has defiled, and the last harvest-song has been sung, and the last belfry has rung forth its welcome to the New Year, our posterity will look upon Merrie England much in the same way that we look upon the golden age, or the glorious days of King Arthur's Court.

#### SONG.

STAY, sweet Day, for thou art fair,  
Fair, and full, and calm;  
Crowned, through all thy golden hours,  
With Love's brightest, richest flowers,  
Strong in Faith's unshaken powers,  
Blest in Hope's pure balm.

Stay, what chance and change may wait,  
As you glide away;  
Now is all so glad and bright;  
Now we breathe in sure delight;  
Now we laugh in fate's despite;  
Stay with us, sweet Day.

Ah, she cannot, may not stop;  
All things must decay;  
Then with heart, and head, and will,  
Take the joy that lingers still,  
Prize the pause in wrong and ill,  
Prize the passing day.

#### LAD'S LOVE.

##### A STORY IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

Five-and-twenty years is a long gap in a man's lifetime. The path he is destined to travel along has plenty of time, in such a lapse, to run through valleys of humiliation, and up hills of difficulty; the sun has plenty of time to shine upon him; and the stinging biting rain, driven against him by the bitter wind of adversity, to blind him and make him stagger as he goes. Flowers of life are culled, thorns pierce, in such a breadth of

years. The character, thoughts, and feelings are so changed, so carved by the chisel of time, that the man of five-and-forty would scarce recognise himself in the lad of twenty who used to look at him from his mirror every morning, and whistle for very lightheartedness as he brushed the thick curly locks which are now so sparse and streaked with silver lines.

All these varieties of experience, all these changes had come upon Ruthven Dyott, since that summer's night, five-and-twenty long years ago, when we saw him stand bare-headed in the mellow light to watch a woman moving swiftly through the meadow-grass, which rustled under the touch of her trailing robe as she passed.

Passed—where?

Out of his ken—out of his life—though he knew it not.

For two days later he received Millicent's promised letter—the letter for which his very soul within him had seemed to wait—and when the thing so longed-for came, its kindly friendliness and calm sisterly interest half maddened him.

Quite maddened him, he came to think in a time to come, as he looked back upon the hasty impulsive actions that followed. No answer was sent to Milly, and Ruthven Dyott hurried up north to spend a month or six weeks with his own relatives, without attempting to visit the red house by the river—determined, in fact, to try and banish from his memory the very existence of its inmates.

"Send me one line to say that you forgive me for any pain I may have caused you; and believe me, dear Ruthven, the time will come when you will look back upon all this as a passing fancy that it was well indeed should pass, and leave your young life still free."

Thus had run that fateful letter. But the "one line" was never sent.

"I have loved a statue, not a woman. I have been a fool, but now I am wise. I have been blind, but now I see."

Thus ran Ruthven's thoughts during that long journey north. But with time, and the near approach of his departure from England, came softer feelings.

Yes, he would go and say farewell to the woman who had been to him so good and true a friend; he would once more watch the river stealing along beneath the alder-trees; once more wander in the garden where all old-fashioned flowers grew and flourished exceedingly.

Autumn's hand had changed the aspect of

the garden and river since last he had seen them. The leaves of the Virginian creeper, red, and gold, and russet-brown, were strewn upon the grass, a carpet daintily tinted; the roses were all dead; the alder-trees had shed their best leaves.

Strangest change of all, not a window was uncurtained, and when Ruthven rang at the porch-door, the first sound that greeted him was the grating of locks and bolts.

"Are Sir Geoffrey and Miss Warner from home?" he asked of a withered old crone who blinked at him from under shaggy white tufted brows, and evidently bore him bitter grudge for having disturbed her from her lair, wherever that might be.

"Sir Geoffrey's dead and buried. I don't know where the lady's gone."

That was all.

Then came the grating of keys and bolts once more, and Ruthven was left out there in the dark autumn day, with the fallen leaves under his feet, and dead and dying blossoms all around him. So that kindly genial old man was gone! Death must have come suddenly, too; and Milly—how she must have suffered! To hurry home, to write, not the "one line" she had asked for, but many lines, urgent, sympathetic, tender, was Ruthven's next proceeding. He knew of no address whither he might send, except the old home now so desolate. He could but trust to the faint hope that "To be forwarded," strongly underlined, might appeal to any conscience like the crone with the bushy brows possessed; he could but wait and watch for some word of greeting during the few days that remained to him before he must start on his long journey.

He watched and waited in vain. The silence remained unbroken; and he bore that silence with him to the new land and new life in which his lot now lay—a burden heavy to be borne.

Yet time did its inevitable work of healing. New scenes, new stirring aspects of work and life, drifted thought into new channels. Ruthven never forgot Millicent Warner, nor yet the red house by the river, and the pleasant hours passed in the room with the wide low window that looked across the grass and flowers to where the alder branches bent to kiss the ripples as they passed. He did not forget; but the picture grew dimmer; and in time—what changes may not be wrought by that silent resistless influence men call time!—Ruthven Dyott, recalling the words of Milly's letter, "This is but a fancy that

will pass," looked wise, and owned to his own heart that those words were true. They had seemed cruel in a day that was past; but then he saw "as in a glass darkly;" now he stood face to face with the certainty that Millicent had been cruel only to be kind.

"It was no rare thing," he thought to himself, smiling at the folly of a day that was dead, "for the object of a lad's first love to be a woman some years his elder." The romance died away and no harm was done. A good and pure influence, this woman whose experience of life had chastened and refined her character, had kept his life free from all evil; there was much reverence mingled with the tenderness that he in his youthful ignorance had taken for a passion.

Yes; the story was neither rare nor new; and now, two years after that parting in the gloaming by the river, the real romance of a passionate love came to Ruthven Dyott.

Millicent had swayed him, now he learned the sweetness of swaying another. Millicent had been his guide, now was he the guide of one who found all her sunshine in his smile.

Millicent's dark grave eyes had been wont to watch him with helpful interest, but not always approvingly. Alice, his girlish blue-eyed wife, would not know how to begin to chide him, much less to go on.

She studied his comfort as the one thing worth striving for; counted herself blessed among women in that he had chosen her from all the world to be for ever by his side; read the books he loved, so that she might be able to speak of them with him; made, in a word, a perfect wife. But by her very perfection and the utter unselfishness of her devotion, she cherished, rather than helped him to fight against, a certain wilful headstrong impulsiveness, that Milly, poor faithful Milly whose honest tongue would smooth over no truth however disagreeable, had oftentimes called his "rock ahead."

Never were happier people than Ruthven Dyott and his wife—for a time.

But at last sore and bitter trouble came to them; and in this wise.

A year after their marriage a child had been born to them; a boy with Ruthven's dark eyes, clear-cut features, and sunny smile. When the lad could stagger three steps across the floor and then fall into his mother's outstretched arms, Alice thought her cup of joy could brim no higher; when

his baby-lips began to try and lisp her name, she thought that there was yet another note added to the exquisite music of life.

And so the years passed on.

The child became the boy, the boy the youth; and then to Ruthven Dyott and his wife Alice, it was given to learn by bitter experience the truth of poor old Lear's exceeding bitter cry that "sharper than a serpent's tooth it is, to have a thankless child."

Cuthbert, this only son of theirs, was worse than thankless. Is there such a thing as too much love, as well as too much harshness in the rearing and tending of a child?

The mother of this young fellow would never have allowed such to be the case. In her eyes all the wrong her boy did, all the shame and sorrow he brought upon his father and herself, was the fault of somebody else—first of this false friend, then of that bad companion; never of himself. He was "too easily led," she said, "and wicked people took advantage of his gentle disposition."

Her husband said little or nothing, and, for her dear sake, was generous and forgiving to the young sinner. But he grew to look older than his years; his upright form began to stoop. He would walk along silent and preoccupied, his eyes on the ground, the brows above them puckered in thought. More than once, when Cuthbert, flushed of face, disorderly in dress, unsteady of gait, loud-voiced, defiant, or desponding, according to the stage of drunkenness at which he had arrived, found himself in his father's presence, that father did but turn upon his heel, lock himself in his private room where none—not even Alice—dare follow, and there "dree his weird," in solitary, brooding misery.

He had been wilful, impulsive, oftentimes lacking in patience and self-control, but he had kept his life clean and clear; he had never degraded the manhood within him; he had toiled hard at his profession; name, fame, wealth, success were his; and now, of what value did they seem in his haggard eyes? What was to become of this ghastly "fetch" of his, this lad so like in outward seeming to the boy who had gone to London nearly thirty years ago to try to push his fortunes, the boy to whom Millicent Warner had been so good and true a friend? Yes; strangely enough in these the days of his bitter sorrow, Ruthven Dyott bethought him of the past, remem-



bered the woman who had brightened and sweetened his life and then passed out of it like a shadow that is gone—remembered her with a new spring of gratitude rising in his arid heart towards her memory like a sparkling rill of water in a desert.

He set himself to wonder what had become of her.

Was she married long ago, or had her chastened spirit fled from earth to heaven, and left only her memory to shine in the hearts of those who had known and loved her?

How he should like to have one of the old long chats with her, tell her all about this unhappy boy of his, and of Alice, his darling, his wife who had been so tender and loving a companion to him all these years! Alice weighed upon his mind almost as heavily as Cuthbert. For a strange change had come upon Mrs. Dyott. She, so guileless, so confiding, had grown silent and reserved. No one ever saw her weep, but her eyes were always weary, misty, and with a weird far-off look in their blue depths, as if they were for ever looking for something they had lost—always wistful, pleading, pathetic. Were they seeking for the boy she had lost—the little lad she remembered staggering to her arms with merry ringing laughter—the boy whose new clothes for his first going to school she could hardly see to mark legibly, for the tears that rose so fast, and had to be dashed away between every dip of the pen? Who can read aught of the sublime mystery of a mother's heart mourning over the backsliding of the child she brought into the world? Ruthven grew almost to fear his wife. Her dim eyes meeting his would send a chill through every nerve in his body.

He had never been a man of much religious profession; but now in these terrible days he was driven to God's feet by the scourge of pain; he learnt to pray, more with the heart than with the lips, perhaps, yet none the less fervently for that; to pray, not for himself but for Alice, his wife, that Heaven would have pity on her suffering soul, and lift the cloud that was darkening all her life.

About this time an old friend came to visit Alice Dyott, one of those friends whom it is given to some women to make, oftentimes truer, fonder, and more faithful than those to whom the ties of kindred bind us ever so closely.

"Let your boy come home with me for a while," said this good friend to Ruthven

when her stay under his roof drew to a close; "your wife is breaking her heart over him."

"I know it," said Ruthven, his head sinking on his breast; "who better? And yet I am helpless, I can do nothing."

"Oh yes, you can," said his companion. "You can let Cuthbert come to us. He is my godson, you know; so I have some claim to a part and lot in him."

"What will your husband say?"

"What, James? He'll say I'm the most sensible little woman in the world; he always does, you know."

"With cause too," answered Ruthven with a smile.

So Mrs. James Coveney had her way, and Cuthbert left home for a time, an arrangement in which, after a long talk with her friend (an interview from which Mrs. Coveney came forth with no eyes to speak of, but in which Alice shed no single tear), his mother quietly acquiesced.

The Dyotts at this period of their lives were living in London. Mr. and Mrs. Coveney dwelt far north, in a lovely nest of a place among the English lakes; so Cuthbert found little similarity between the life he went into and the life he had left; and, for a time at all events, the excitement of change must—so his father thought—tend to keep bad habits in abeyance.

Mrs. Coveney wrote at intervals, but beyond a general cheeriness of tone, nothing very definite could be gathered from her letters.

At last, Ruthven Dyott, going into his study one evening just when the daylight was dying and the gloaming dropping earthwards like a grey veil, saw the gleam of a white patch upon his desk.

It was a letter, and in Cuthbert's hand.

Now the boy seldom wrote when away from home. What indeed was there for him to say? Was it any good to make promises that were but "written in sand," doomed to be washed away and leave no trace once the tide of temptation should arise?

Silence was better than meaningless words, as both father and son had by this time learned.

Hence this letter took to Ruthven's eyes the guise of a possible evil. Had the boy got into some fresh trouble—yielded to some new temptation—made the friends who had nobly stretched out a hand to him bitterly repentant of their generosity? Was it that old story, a demand for money

to pay debts of so-called honour, as the only way in which public exposure might be averted?

Ruthven Dyott was no coward, yet he shrank from opening his son's letter. Renewed hopes had lifted themselves in his heart, like tiny shafts of green piercing an arid soil. He had begun to fancy that Heaven had heard and was about to answer the prayers offered through sleepless nights and weary, anxious days. Now, might it not be that his hopes were to be slain at a breath, as the tender springing herb by one night of biting frost? With quickened pulse and breath, he broke the seal of Cuthbert's letter.

What were the words he read?

"Since I have been here, it has seemed, dear father, as though scales have fallen from my eyes. Is it too late, I wonder, for me to win your love and trust once more, to try and make some reparation for the past? I have a friend beside me as I write who tells me that it is never too late to mend. It is this friend who has led me to strive after better things; who has shown me the possibility of retracing all the past. The whole thing has been so strange, so wonderful, I hardly know how to tell you of it, or to explain it, even to myself. I first went with Mrs. Coveney to see this new friend of mine. Then I went alone. Then I could not bear to be a single day without going. There seemed some strange kind of influence that drew us the one to the other—this dear sweet woman and me. She is quite old, her hair is white, and turned back over a high cushion, like an old picture. Her face is perfectly beautiful, and has no colour in it except the darkness of her eyes. They are eyes which seem to look you through and through. The first time I saw her, it was wonderful; you would almost have thought she had known me all my life. She held my hand in hers, and as she looked at me, I saw two bright tears gather in her eyes. I cannot tell you how the friendship between us grew: it started into life at once, I think, like Jonah's gourd that grew all in a night. I have told her all the past. I have kept nothing back; not even things that it hurt dreadfully to tell. There never was anyone in the world so easy to tell things to; and, as she talks to you, she makes you feel that you would rather do anything in all the world than give her cause to be sorry about anything ever again. I see I have not told you her name. It is Mannering—Miss Mannering—for she is what I suppose would be

called an 'old maid.' She is very rich, and all the poor people round about here look upon her as their best friend. Mrs. Coveney says she has given, at different times, large sums of money to help the poor in our crowded cities. Isn't it like a beautiful story? But I must not forget the sad side of it. This dear lady is almost always suffering. She cannot walk about like other people, but lies all day long upon a couch near the window of her room, where she can see the lake. She says she loves to watch the changing shadows that pass across its surface, and hardly knows whether she loves it best on a sunny day or a cloudy one. I heard a lady say to Mrs. Coveney the other day that 'poor Miss Mannering's life hung upon a thread.' So this is the sad side of my story, you see; but I am glad with all my heart that I have seen and known her before that slender thread has snapped in two. I want you and my dearest mother to try and believe in me just a little. It will help me more than anything else in the struggle which must come, to see that you do, however little it may be. It must be a hard thing for you to forget and forgive the past and to put some faith in the future; but, dear father—try do all these things for me!"

We can most of us bear a great sorrow once we brace ourselves to meet it; but the touch of an unlooked-for joy is sometimes more than the full heart can endure.

When he had read thus far in his boy's letter, Ruthven Dyott crossed the room sharply, sat down beside his desk, hid his face upon his arms, and broke out crying like a child.

Sometimes in a black and stormy sky a tiny rift appears, through which a struggling sunbeam "strikes the world."

The bitter home-sorrow which had come upon Ruthven Dyott and his wife Alice had oftentimes made them feel like weary travellers beneath a sunless sky.

Now came the rift overhead, and the sun-ray of hope. Ruthven saw his wife's sad face soften to a smile; noted a new buoyancy in her step; a lifting of the misty dimness that had stolen the light from her eyes.

She was none of those jealous mothers who grudge to see the working of any influence save their own in the lives of their children. Only let her be sure that influence was for good and she could thank Heaven for it as for a welcome boon. She set in her prayers the name of

this new friend whom Cuthbert had grown to love; she knew that the hand which should lead him back to the lost pathway of rectitude must lead him back to her—his mother.

She felt as if her boy, innocent and loving, was about to be given back to her.

When the Sunday came round it so chanced that the Lesson for the day contained the parable of the prodigal son, and as Alice listened to the exultant cry: "For this my son was dead and is alive again; was lost, and is found," her husband saw the big tears gather and fall, and knew that they were tears of joy.

For Cuthbert's father and mother believed in the sincerity of his repentance, believed in the reality of his determination for the future; and Alice had written to him a letter that no one else, not even her husband ever saw—a letter in which she had poured forth all her heart, speaking of the past as blotted out, of the future as radiant with hope and firm resolve.

They began to look for Cuthbert's return home, and were full of plans for his welfare. Hitherto he had cast aside all opportunities of making a career for himself in life; now things would be different. He would work with them, not pull against them.

But instead of the expected arrival came a summons.

"Dearest father," wrote the boy, "will you come up here as quickly as you can? An old friend wants to see you. If you do not come at once you will come too late. Miss Mannerling was once Millicent Warner. She had to change her name to take possession of some property; but she says you will remember the name she bore in days long past. Father, she has been so much to me, will you not do as she asks, and come and see her before she dies? She is so feeble one can hardly hear her speak. Yesterday we thought she would not live till night."

"Oh, Ruthven!" cried his wife, "do not lose an hour—go and tell her how Cuthbert's mother blesses her name; go and see your old friend, dear husband!"

So Ruthven Dyott took a hurried journey north, to take a last farewell of the woman he had loved long years ago, and to whom he now owed a debt of gratitude which never could be paid; for death was stepping in to claim the future.

She lay in a darkened room. Her worn and attenuated frame was draped in a snowy wrapper whose folds were scarcely whiter

than the face of the dying woman, or the still luxuriant hair that was put back from her brow. The small, high-featured, clear-cut face that he remembered so well looked up at him. The sensitive, delicately-chiselled nostrils had grown transparent; the mouth was deeply lined; the lips pallid; but the old sweetness lurked in the smile that greeted him. It was not a meeting of many words at first; hearts were too full for lips to be eloquent.

"Ruthven, old friend," said Milly, and then, with her hand in his, kept silence.

"You have been so good——" began Ruthven presently.

"I have done my best," she put in quickly; "and that is what I wanted so much to see you for; your boy has done you and his mother great wrong, but I believe in him. Ruthven, do you have faith in him too. I feel that the turning-point in his young life has come, and that he will take the straight road now. Surely, dear friend, the old impulsive ways that I used to scold you for long ago, have hung about you still, for sometimes, so it seems to me, you have been hasty with the lad, and met his expressions of sorrow with a hot word or two that would better have been left unsaid? As to your wife—ah, Ruthven, I should like to have seen your wife—you will see that in the time to come her boy will make up to her for the pain he has cost her in the past, and she will not grudge the tears she has shed. Mothers never do, I think."

"She is the dearest, tenderest, best——" said Ruthven.

"I am sure of that. Tell her that she does not seem like a stranger to me, but like someone I have known and loved, and suffered with. I have thought so much about her since I knew her boy, that she has seemed to grow quite near me."

Millicent lay there like a waxen image, so white, so still, with closed eyes, and lips gently moving.

And Ruthven watching her, felt old memories rise and surge in his heart like the waves of a troubled sea.

All at once she looked up at him, eagerly, intently.

"I knew Cuthbert for your son the moment I saw him, and I took him straight into my heart."

"You put me away from your heart in the old days, Millicent."

A slight spasm crossed her marble features.

"Did I? Well, I have made up for it



now. I have kept you in my memory all these years."

"Why did you never answer my last letter?"

"I always was one to do things thoroughly, you know; even my enemies allowed that; and so I sent you away thoroughly."

He thought the hand that still lay in his was growing strangely cold, and had half a mind to call for some attendant. But, as if divining his intention, Milly gently shook her head.

"What a careless boy you were, upsetting all my cotton bobbins!" she said presently with a faint smile.

"But I was very sorry, and picked them all up again; you counted them, you know," he answered, humouring her mood.

She muttered some words he could not catch. Surely, surely, the hand in his was growing colder still.

Her mind was wandering back to the old home.

Once more she saw the river stealing on, whispering through the sedges, gliding beneath the alder-boughs; and Ruthven, not the life-worn man who stood beside her now, but a slender, dark-eyed boy with a smile like sunshine.

Hearing her breath come short and fast, Ruthven would fain have sought some aid, but the feeble fingers held him fast.

"Do not go," she said, seeming to battle for a moment's fresh strength; "there is something else I want to say; put your head closer down to me. I am not strong, you see, and—my voice fails me."

He fell upon his knees beside the couch, crushing his lips against her hands.

"Ruthven," she said softly, "you say I put you from my heart, and it is true, dear, but—I loved you all the while."

Silence: no sound but the ticking of a clock hard by. A life's secret has been told, and the answer to its telling is the sound of a man's weeping.

"I knew it was best so, for you and for me—and I was right, you see, wasn't I? It was a passing fancy, that love of yours. It was 'lad's love,' dear, and nothing more. Such as it was, you gave it to me in all truth, and, Ruthven, it has lasted me all my life."

She drew one hand from the clasp of his, and for a moment gently touched the bowed head which almost rested on her breast.

Ruthven's hair was thickly lined with grey, worn from the temples; almost white just above the brow.

But the eyes of the dying woman were dim. She noted none of these things.

To her that bowed head was dark with clustering locks as in the olden time; the dear dead time whose last knell was now quivering through that silent, shadowy room.

How long Ruthven knelt there he never knew. When at last he raised his head, the face of the woman he had once loved so well was still—the hands he clasped were cold—in death.

## "OPEN SESAME."

### CHAPTER VI. BON VOYAGE.

THE quartermaster's office looked out upon the quadrangle formed by the barracks, and a brilliant light from its windows made a path of brightness in the surrounding gloom.

Delisle noticed that this corner of the building was better cared for than the rest. Creepers were trained against the walls; plants grew in the windows, the outlines of the leaves in strong relief against the light within.

M. Huron was perfectly polite, but also reserved in his manner. He motioned Delisle to go before him into his office, dismissed the men who were waiting for orders, closed and fastened the door, and placed a chair for his guest, or prisoner.

"Monsieur, we have met before," he said after a long searching look at his prisoner.

"Possibly; I do not recollect it."

"Permit me to recall the circumstances. Before I became a gendarme I was sous-officier of artillery. It was my unlucky destiny to aid in the attack upon Paris, when Paris was occupied by the Commune. Frenchmen fighting against Frenchmen—oh, it was terrible! Well, monsieur, you were there also, but on the opposite side."

M. Delisle felt his heart sink within him. He saw himself once more a prisoner exposed to the sufferings and indignities of convict-life. It would be death to him, slow and painful death.

"Pardieu," went on the gendarme. "If ever there was a man for whom I felt a profound respect it was for him who directed the artillery on the opposite side. What vigour of fire, what marvellous practice, despite deficiencies of all kinds! It warms the heart to think of. There was a splendid artillery officer lost to France in that brave man."

Delisle bowed and said, "Possibly."

He could not help feeling that here was a snare. He was to avow himself, and thus save the gendarme the trouble of identification. Huron read the other's suspicions in his face and was hurt by them.

"On the faith of a soldier," he cried, "I am not seeking to entrap you; remain to me what you like to be, but I declare that I long to grasp the hand of that man, to thank him for keeping up the honour of the artillery, even on the wrong side."

Delisle smiled and held out his hand.

"At any rate," he said, "I can do no harm in grasping the hand of a brave soldier."

"Ah yes; you understand, monsieur," cried the other, grasping the hand held out to him with enthusiasm. "A soldier, always a soldier—still a soldier—never a policeman. Bah! Now that rascal of a Père Douze, he had marked you down. Well, I thought it was time to act then. And now, monsieur, a moment for business. Perhaps it is my duty to ask you all kinds of questions—to demand your papers. Well, I shall only ask you one question—not whence you came—but whither are you going?"

"To England," replied Delisle without hesitation.

"Upon your word of honour?"

"On my word of honour."

"Then I have only to wish you bon voyage," said Huron, bowing politely.

"And I am at liberty to go?" asked Delisle.

"Certainly if you wish it; but a word of advice. You are going to the station on foot. You are liable to be interrogated on the way. Wait here till morning, and then take the first diligence. That will be safer, and I shall be proud if you will be my guest for the night."

Delisle accepted the offer gratefully, and M. Huron set himself to work to entertain his guest. They talked freely of the events of which they had both been witnesses: of the war, the siege of Paris, the Commune, and all the rest. Then they passed to less exciting topics. Huron was something of a naturalist, and Delisle had tastes in the same direction. The gendarme was also a collector. He had sundry Napoleonic relics which he valued highly. Also he had formed a collection of coins, chiefly of curious pieces which he had met with in actual circulation.

"And here, monsieur," cried Huron, exhibiting an ordinary-looking five-franc piece, "is the gem of my collection—a five-

franc piece of the Commune. It will interest you, perhaps, monsieur."

Delisle took the piece and examined it. It was an ordinary five-franc piece with the effigy of Napoleon the Third, and the imperial arms upon the reverse.

"I don't see anything to recall the Commune in that," he said as he handed back the coin.

"Ah, monsieur, you were not in the Ministry of Finance, evidently," said Huron, laughing. "But it is really of the Commune, and here is the history of it: The federates, short of money, set to work to coin silver. But there were no means of striking a new die. Artists, workmen, all had disappeared from the mint. Thus they were obliged to use existing dies with the effigy of the Emperor. But the acting director of the mint found means to effect a slight modification. On the reverse of the five-franc pieces of the Empire, are certain small marks, one of which represented the stamp of the director, at that time a bee. For this a trident was substituted, and you will observe, monsieur, that my coin presents this quite unique mark. Hardly were the coins struck when the national troops entered Paris. All the new coins went back to the melting-pot—all but a few specimens preserved in the mint, and perhaps a dozen or so which had somehow got into circulation. Hence you will agree that this coin is a curiosity. In fifty years time it will be worth—ah!"

The quartermaster vaguely indicated with a wave of the hand the fabulous future value of such a curiosity.

"Well," said Delisle, smiling, "I can assure you that the fugitive federates did not carry many of such curiosities away with them. They were not so skilful as the imperialists in making their profits."

"They had not had the experience," replied the quartermaster with a grimace.

After this the conversation languished, and Delisle was glad to turn in, wondering not a little at the chance which had turned what seemed a fatal mishap into the means of safety. It was broad daylight when he awoke, and the quartermaster was standing over him with a café au rhum.

"I hear the bells of the diligence, monsieur; it will be here in two minutes."

#### CHAPTER VII. "OPEN SESAME."

M. BRUNET spent a very troubled, restless night. He could not help grieving over the fate of poor Delisle, and he felt that his misfortune was in a great measure

owing to his unselfish conduct in the matter of the money. And was Charles worthy of such a sacrifice? Brunet tried hard to think so, for he loved the youth. He had always taken his part against everybody, and felt quite a paternal tenderness in his behalf. Still he had acted badly, and terrible evil would have come out of it but for Delisle's chivalric and somewhat unpractical generosity. Early in the morning, as he was preparing to start for the gendarmerie to see what he could do for Delisle, he received a message from Huron. His friend was all right and had started by the first diligence, en route for England. Thus one of his troubles disappeared in the bright morning light, and Brunet took his way to the bank in a more cheerful mood. It was necessary to be there early to see about Charles's affair, and he took the precaution to remove his hoard from its hiding-place, tied it up in one of M. Lalonde's canvas bags, and left it on his way with the proprietor of the hotel where he took his daily meals. There were some little precautions to be taken before he finally paid away the money. When he reached the banker's house he was surprised to see Charles sunning himself in the open air on the bench by the door. He was not in the habit of rising early, but then it must be admitted he had something to occupy his mind on this particular morning.

"Dear Brunet," said Charles, taking him by the arm and leading him to the quay, "will you forgive me for having made you the subject of a harmless mystification? All that I told you last night was pure romance. I took it into my head to try your friendship, and also to decide a question which had arisen with some comrades as to whether you were really as poor as you pretended to be. The result, my dear Brunet, has been to raise my opinion of you as a friend and a capitalist. If you have many such little sums to dispose of, I shall be happy to undertake their investment for you."

Brunet dropped his hold of Charles's arm and looked at the young man in a kind of terror. What was true about him? what false? It wounded Brunet more to think that Charles should have played upon him such a heartless joke, than that he should have been led away to commit a criminal act; and when Charles, rather frightened at the effect his manoeuvre had produced, tried to soothe his friend with flattering words, Brunet could only reply:

"Charles, you are an excellent actor."

As he thought over the affair, however, Charles's conduct assumed a less sombre aspect. And when Charles reiterated his assurances of affection for Marie, and declared that he would exact his father's consent to their marriage before he left for Paris that day, Brunet almost recovered his equanimity.

"Let me speak to your father first, Charles," he said; "perhaps I may smooth the way for you."

He remembered M. Lalonde's words on the previous night: "If only the ten thousand francs were in hard cash!"

It was nearly mid-day when Lalonde made his appearance in the bank. He put on his black silk cap, which meant that he was resolved upon work; went to his safe and tried to open it. But the lock resisted his efforts.

"Hum! it is very strange," he whispered, and went back to his desk. There he sat tapping his forehead, and trying to recall distinctly the events of the previous night. A thing like this was unexampled; he constantly changed his password, but never before had he suffered it to escape his memory. Last night he had certainly taken a little wine. What could have been in his head at the time?

At this moment the huissier's clerk came in with a list of bills, some to pay, others to receive. There was a balance to pay, however, of a few thousand francs. Brunet looked towards his master.

"All right," cried Lalonde snappishly.

"As soon as he has opened the safe, I will bring in the money," said Brunet, and the clerk took his departure.

"Now what was running in my head last night?" repeated the banker, and once more he tried over his usual passwords. But the door of the safe remained obstinately closed, solid as adamant. He went into the house to take counsel with his wife. She was a poor frightened thing, but not without mother-wit.

"What are your usual passwords?" she asked.

"If I told you they would be no longer secret," said Lalonde.

"Try some of your words with the variation of a letter," suggested the wife, and the banker went back to put the suggestion in practice. After a certain time had been spent in this way without result, Brunet's attention was aroused, and, leaning back in his chair, he looked round to see what was going on.



"Here a pretty thing happened!" cried the banker, giving the studs a vindictive twirl. "I've forgotten my password."

An expression of malignant satisfaction came over Brunet's face. He had often secretly resented his master's want of confidence in him. After his five-and-twenty years' service, surely he could be trusted with the charge of the safe.

"Well, there is nothing else for it, Brunet," said the banker. "You must come here and try every combination of letters till you come to the right one."

"Wait a moment," said Brunet, beginning to make rapid calculations on paper.

He was a great calculator, Brunet, skilled even in algebra and mathematics, it was believed, whereas Lalonde could hardly add three figures together on paper, although his head rarely deceived him.

"Well, what are you figuring about now, Brunet?" asked his master severely.

"I am calculating how many possible permutations there are in your five buttons, each with its twenty-four letters."

"And how many do you make it, eh? About a thousand?"

"Close upon ninety-seven millions," cried Brunet, his face purple with an emotion not altogether painful, but keeping his eyes steadily fixed upon his calculations; "and assuming I make six changes a minute, and work for twelve hours a day—and the employment is monotonous, monsieur—twelve hours a day, without ever making holiday, it would take me just sixty-one years to exhaust all the permutations."

"Grand Dieu!" cried the banker, really appalled. "But, Brunet, what is to be done?"

"Send for the locksmith," suggested Brunet.

"And spoil my magnificent safe which cost two thousand francs! Besides, he might hammer away for a month."

"Telegraph to Paris for a skilled workman."

"And in the meantime I haven't two hundred francs outside my safe."

"I can tell you a means," cried Brunet, radiant with satisfaction, "by which you will have ten thousand francs at your disposal at once. Consent to your son's marriage with Marie. And then ten thousand francs shall be in your hands in five minutes."

"Nom d'un nom!" muttered the banker under his breath. "It is his doing, after all."

And then there flashed into his mind the recollection that Brunet had been in the office on the night before, very late, while he slept, and that, awaking, Brunet had told him some foolish story about a prisoner at the gendarmerie.

"The artful man—how ready he was with his figures! And now he has me in a regular snare!"

He must temporise with the rogue.

"Well, well, Brunet, let us see the money, anyhow. But we must talk to Charles, the rascal. If his heart is upon this girl—well, who knows? Go and fetch the cash."

Brunet hurried out to fetch the money, delighted with the turn affairs had taken. Hardly had he gone when Père Douze put in his head at the door, his face mottled purple and orange, and one small patch of crimson at the tip of his bulbous nose.

Lalonde felt that he must take the père into his confidence. Unhappily, there was no Commissaire of Police at the moment. The office was often vacant at Canville, the people being so peaceable and honest that no one who looked for promotion would take up the appointment; and on the other hand, there was such hospitality that a man of genial habits might well fall into disgrace like Père Douze.

"Brunet is at the bottom of it," cried the père, apprised of all the circumstances. "He came in when you were asleep; he found the safe open, and he pillaged it."

"He did not find it open," cried the banker firmly. "I never in my life left the safe open."

The père, who knew Lalonde's obstinate disposition, did not venture to controvert this.

"But perhaps you whispered the word in your sleep," he suggested in a low tone. "It was perhaps some pet word that you might repeat in a dream, and he overheard you."

Lalonde turned from crimson to purple. The père talked as if he knew all about the password. Was it possible that he babbled in his sleep—that all the world knew about his open sesame? Where was safety to be found? And his safe pillaged! He might be ruined, stripped of every sou, and yet not be able to move a finger, the secret of his loss locked up in that miserable safe. He had almost a mind to dash his head against it, such was his rage and despair.

"He is off—you may rely upon that," whispered the père again. "One of his

accomplices went off by the early diligence. He took the bulk of the plunder, no doubt."

"Stop him, stop him!" roared the banker. "Grand Dieu! am I not the maire? Telegraph—post—rouse the gendarmes!"

"Leave it to me," cried the père; "don't trouble those worthless gendarmes. Give me your authority. I'll telegraph to the Commissaries of Police all round."

"But stop!" cried the maire, recollecting himself. "He is going to bring me ten thousand francs. Why should he do that if he has robbed me?"

"Will he bring it, think you?" cried the père derisively. "And if he does, is it not a blind to keep you from having your safe opened by main force?"

"You are right," cried Lalonde, "it is all treachery. Away with you, père!"

But when the père had gone, Lalonde grew a little more calm. After all he had never detected Brunet in filching the value of a centime; and all the world had a good opinion of him. And then Brunet had looked positively comical as he contemplated his master's troubles. Was it a joke after all? Had Brunet surprised his secret, and substituted his own password out of mere mischief. Well, in that case he would have chosen some word quite familiar to him, a word of five letters, the first that came to hand. Lalonde was not wanting in penetration, once on this track he soon came to the conclusion that the range of words likely to occur to his clerk on the spur of the moment would not be extensive. He looked curiously on Brunet's desk. A little slip of paper lying there contained his memoranda for the day. Among them, "To speak about C. and Marie."

"Ah! if Marie should be the charm after all," growled the banker, and he went to the safe to try. "Open sesame!"

Lalonde threw himself eagerly upon his treasure and gave a sob of relief as he recognised that the bulk of his funds at all events was safe. He laughed softly to himself, pleased with his own penetration.

"Sixty-one years, and ninety million

trials," he growled out. "Ah, Master Brunet, you did not think you had a penetrating intellect to deal with."

But he lost not a moment in verifying the contents of the safe. Yes, there was missing the exact sum of ten thousand francs.

"What, you have got the safe open, monsieur!" cried Brunet, entering at the moment.

There was something troubled and tremulous in the voice, and the banker turning round threw at him a look full of anger and reproach.

"Villain!" he cried, "it is you who have robbed me; robbed me that you might palm off your miserable niece into my family; and you thought to cover your crime by spoiling my beautiful safe. Go down upon your knees, man, restore the plunder, ask my pardon—then you may hope to escape the Court of Assizes."

Brunet, his eyes flashing, his teeth clenched, advanced upon Lalonde in a rage.

"Miserable slanderer!" he cried, while Lalonde, almost paralysed with fear, called in a strangled voice:

"Help! Help!"

"I am here, monsieur," cried Père Douze, pushing in at the moment. "Lucien Brunet, I arrest you in the name of the law!"

At this dread formula Brunet's forces forsook him. He sank into a chair in mortal dread and despair. In a moment the truth flashed upon him. The banker had been robbed of ten thousand francs. He, Brunet, had upon his person that exact sum, and it was quite impossible for him to account in any creditable way for being in possession of it.

"Ah," cried Lalonde, who had recovered his voice and courage, "the moment for mercy is passed. It is for the Court to deal with you now."

"I care not," cried Brunet, rousing himself from the despairing torpor which had come over him, "if you, whom I have served all these years, believe me a thief."

He could say no more, but hid his face in his hands to hide the burning tears that welled from his eyes.

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